

Message Text

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S E C R E T JIDDA 5847

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

FROM ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, EG, IS, SA
SUBJECT: TALKS WITH SAUD AND FAHD ON LEBANON

REF: JIDDA 5841 (NOTAL), STATE 202051

1. SUMMARY: AS REPORTED REFTEL, I DISCUSSED LEBANON WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD EVENING AUGUST 9 BUT BECAUSE OF DEPARTMENT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO HOLD OFF (STATE 200866) DID NOT MAKE APPROACH SET OUT IN STATE 200854. IN MEETING WITH CROWN PRINCE FAHD EVENING AUGUST 10 I WNET OVER THE POINTS I MADE THE PREVIOUS EVENING WITH SAUD BUT STRESSED THE HEIGHTENED DANGER OF ESCALATION AND ISRAELI CONNERN OVER SYRAIN ACTIONS, AND THE NEED TO FIND A WAY TO DISENGAGE THE SYRIANS AND THE CHRISTIANS. FAHD AND SAUD GOT THE POINT. THEY SAID THEY WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH BOTH SYRIANS AND CHRISTIANS TO TRY TO COOL THINGS

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DOWN, THOUGH SAUDI WARNED THAT THE IDEA OF DISENGAGEMENT COULD BE "VERY DANGEROUS" AND HE HOPED WE WOULD NOT PURSUE IT WITHOUT CAREFUL COORDINATION WITH SARKIS. END SUMMARY.

2. FOR BENEFIT OF ADDRESSEES WHO DID NOT RECEIVE REFTEL, IN THAT PORTION OF OUR TALK EVENING AUGUST 9 THAT CONCERNED LEBANON, FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD RECOUNTED SYRIAN SUSPICIONS

OF THE U.S. AND URGED THAT WE MAKE MORE OF AN EFFORT WITH THE SYRIANS. I DESCRIBED AT LENGTH THE ATTENTION THE SECRETARY GAVE TO LABANON DURING HIS TRIP AND THE EFFORTS BEING MADE BY AMBASSADOR PARKER TO RESTRAIN THE CHRISTIANS AND BY AMBASSADOR LEWIS TO REIN IN THE ISRAELIS, AS WELL AS OUR EFFORTS IN DAMASCUS. BECAUSE OF INSTRUCTIONS IN STATE 200866 TO HOLD OFF, I DID NOT AT THAT TIME GO FURTHER, BUT I INDICATED THAT WE WOULD BE IN CONTINUING CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE SAG ON THIS PROBLEM.

3. IN MEETING WITH CROWN PRINCE FAHD EVENING AUGUST 10, AT WHICH SAUDI WAS PRESENT, I WENT OVER THESE SAME POINTS AGAIN AND WENT FURTHER ON A PERSONAL BASIS IN OIGHT OF STATE 202051 AND BEIRUT 4616. I EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER WHAT SEEMS A DISPROPORTIONATELY HEAVY SYRIAN MILITARY REACTION AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS IN BEIRUT. I POINTED OUT THAT THERE IS A PERCEPTION IN ISRAEL, WHICH WE DID NOT NECESSARILY SHARE, BUT WHICH IS A POLITICAL REALITY WE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT, THAT THE SYRAINS ARE OUT TO DESTROY THE CHRISTIANS AND SAID OUR CONCERN IS THAT ESCALATION OF MILITARY ACTIONS COULD NOT ONLY MAKE OUR PEACE EFFORTS MORE DIFFICULT BUT DESTROY PROSPECTS FOR CAMP DAVID AND PEACE HOPES ALTOGETHER. THE DANGER IS TAHT CHRISTIAN EXTREMISTS WILL CONTINUE THEIR PROVACATIONS AND SYRIANS WILL CONTINUE TO REACT, AND THINGS MAY GET OUT OF HAND. I ALKED WHTEHTER SOME WAY COULD BE FOUND TO
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DISENGAGE THE TWO SIDES. I MAKE CLEAR I WAS NOT TALKING ABOUT WITHDRAWAL OF SYRIAN TROOPS FROM LEBANON BUT OF A DISENGAGEMENT ON THE FIRING LINE. I SAID I WAS RAISING THIS BECAUSE OF THE KEY ROLE SAUDI ARABIA HAD PLAYED IN KEEPING THINGS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND IN AN EARLIER PERIOD. I ASKED IF THERE WASN'T AGAIN AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SAUDI LEADERSHIP HERE.

4. FAHD AND SAUD IMMEDIATELY GOT THE POINT. FAHD SAID THE SAG HAS WORKED CONTINUOUSLY TO FIND A SOLUTION FOR LABANON. HE SAID THE SAUDIS WILL NOW MAKE A RENEWED EFFORT WITH ALL PARTIES, THE MODERATE CHRISTIANS, THE MILITIAS, AND THE SYRIANS.

5. WITH THIS THE MEETING CLOSED (FAHD WAS OBVIOUSLY ANXIOUS TO BE FINDISED) BUT SAUD JOINED US BRIEFLY OUTSIDE. VISIBLY AGITATED, SAUD WARNED THAT THE IDEA OF DISGNGAGEMENT COULD BE "VERY DANGEROUS" AND SAID HE HOPED WE WOULD NOT PURSUE IT WITHOUT CAREFUL COORDIANTION WITH SARKIS, UNDER WHOSE DIRECTION ADF HAS BEEN PLACED. HE PROMISED HOWEVER THAT THE SAG WOULD MAKE EFFORTS WITH BOTH THE CHRISTIANS AND THE SYRAINS TO BRING

ABOUT A COOLING OFF.

6. COMMENT: SAUD'S REMARKS TO ME AFTER FAHD MEETING WERE
VERY BRIEF AND WE CANNOT BE CERTAIN EXACTLY WHY HE CONSIDERED
THE SUGGESTION OF DISENGAGEMENT TO BE HIGHLY DANGEROUS.
HE DID POINT OUT THAT SYRIAN FORCES WHICH WE ARE SEEKING
TO DISENGAGE FROM CHRISTIAN MILITIA ARE PART OF ADF. IT MAY
BE THAT SAUD IS CONCERNED THAT A DISENGAGEMENT ATTEMPT MAY
CALL INTO QUESTION THE AUTHORITY OR THE MANDATE OF THE
ADF ITSELF.
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